“Campaigning for power, not for the people”

- A comparative case study about Cape Town youth and their perceptions of voting

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2018-05-30
The declining political participation among youth has been frequently debated and researched in Western democracies. South Africa is often considered a role model that other African countries can learn from in terms of democracy. The purpose of this study is to investigate how young people in South Africa view voting to understand why turnout among youth is declining. This thesis is based on a field study conducted with two groups from different socioeconomic classes in Cape Town with qualitative in-depth interviews as methodological approach.

The thesis has found that the theories developed from previous research on Western democracies, such as political efficacy, alternative value, partisan attachment and socioeconomic status can partly help explain why youth in South Africa do not vote. However, the study has found that these theories does not provide an ideal framework to understand this phenomenon among young people in less developed democracies. Youth in South Africa faces other problems than their counterparts elsewhere. Poverty, distrust towards the politicians and lack of education makes them unable to fully engage in the political process. Other factors such as race and gender also influence the perception of voting, especially among youth in groups with lower socioeconomic status. Thus, turnout in elections can not be used as an only indicator to measure the quality of a democracy.

**Keywords:** South Africa, youth, democracy, voting, political participation
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Voting is one of the most foundational aspects of a representative democracy, allowing every citizen to express their opinions and make themselves represented in the government. However, in the past decades many democracies over the world have witnessed declining voter turnout in national elections. Previous research on the topic suggests that the declining voter turnout since the 1990’s is a result of the increasing cleavage between the government and the voters.¹ Another reason stated for this trend has been that the perceived importance of elections among voters have decreased since many democracies has managed to build strong welfare states. The importance of political questions that used to play an essential role in elections, such as class cleavages and access to health care, has diminished as a result of this.²

Declining voter turnout in national elections appears to be a global trend among contemporary democracies and this issue is especially prevalent among young people. Turnout rates have dropped most rapidly among youth and previous research on the subject has found youth in Western democracies to be “apathetic” when it comes to engaging in traditional politics by voting. Research shows that youth today does not seem to be as interested as former generations in engaging in formal politics and in the political process.³ Even though there are other possibilities to participate in politics than through voting, the declining voter turnout among youth in representative democracies today is alarming and calls for further investigation as to why young people choose to not cast their ballot. Voting is often considered the easiest way to participate in politics. How can the low turnout rates among young people today be explained and what makes the youth apathetic towards participating in traditional politics?

Previous research has found that apart from having less interest in traditional politics, youth do not possess as much political knowledge as previous generations. Compared to the older generations, youth does not seem to feel like they can identify with political parties and

² Hague, R. & Harrop, M., Comparative Government and Politics, p. 227-228.
politicians, and therefore feel less committed to party politics. However, declining voter turnout among youth in Western democracies has been subject to extensive research in recent years. This concerning issue is also prevalent among less researched democracies in Sub Saharan Africa. The growth rate of the African youth population is higher than anywhere else in the world and yet many African countries has experienced declining turnout rates when lowering the voting age.

The future of the representative democracies is in the hands of the youth that currently seem to be uninterested in traditional politics. In addition, most previous research has focused on more developed countries that has a more stable democratic history. It therefore necessary to turn to less researched democracies in Sub Saharan Africa to investigate if the research and theories developed so far to explain declining turnout within Western democracies can help explain the same phenomenon in Sub Saharan African democracies.

The issue of declining voter turnout among youth in the Sub Saharan context does not exclude South Africa. Voting turnout overall was as high as 86% in the mid-90’s but was down to 57% in last election in 2014. The number of people voting in recent national elections has been declining rapidly among youth compared to the national average (the turnout rate for every age group together), inclining that youth are becoming less and less engaged in national politics. In the General Election in 2014, only 58.7% of people between 18 and 29 years old was registered for voting. In other words, many young people that are eligible to vote does not register to vote before national elections are held.

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1.2 Specified research problem

South Africa is a young democracy and Freedom House Index ranks South Africa as a free country. The issue of declining voter turnout among youth appears to be a paradox in the Post-Apartheid South Africa. The country has a political background of generations struggling for political equality and considering these circumstances one would expect turnout rates among youth to be high. This, however, does not seem to be the case among youth in South Africa since only 58.7% of South Africa’s young population was registered for voting in the last national election in 2014. Unemployment levels among youth has stood over 30% in the past few years and poverty is a substantial problem. This indicates that the low voter turnout cannot be explained by an experienced decreasing importance of elections as previous research on Western democracies has shown.

A high voter turnout is often considered to create legitimacy for democratic states. If the numbers of voters among youth continues to decrease and nothing is done to encourage political participation through voting, the legitimacy of the representative democracy in South Africa will become jeopardized. Furthermore, it is important to look to the future to see how the thoughts of the youth today might shape political participation in the future. There is a risk that turnout rates are going to drop more rapidly when this generation becomes adults. Therefore, this thesis seeks to understand how youth view their chances of affecting politics and what causes them to abstain from voting prior to the next General Election of South Africa that will be held in the middle of 2019. This field study will focus on youth in the geographical context of Cape Town.

1.3 Purpose and research questions

The purpose of the thesis is to investigate if the theories that previous research has found on why young people in more developed democracies abstain from voting can help explain the same phenomenon in South Africa. The study seeks to understand what attitudes young people in Cape Town between 18-28 years old have towards voting prior to the South African General Election in 2019.

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The specified research questions that this study will answer are:

- How does Cape Town youth view voting prior to the upcoming South African General Election in 2019? How does the underlying reasons for these thoughts shape their views on voting?

- How do the young people reason when deciding whether they are going to cast their ballot or not?

1.4 Disposition

The essay is designed as a case study with a qualitative approach and the data has been gathered through in-depth interviews. The previous research on turnout among youth has been used as theoretical framework for this study and will be presented in the next chapter. In chapter three, the methodological approach is presented along with motivations for the methodological choices. In addition, a political background of South Africa will be presented in this chapter with the purpose of providing an insight into the case. Next, the material from the interviews will be laid out together with an analysis of the data. The last part of the thesis consists of a concluding discussion of the result that the study has found.
2. THEORY

In this chapter, the theoretical framework used in the study will be presented. South Africa and Sub Saharan Africa in general is relatively unexplored in terms of voting behavior. The theoretical framework in this study consists of theories and approaches that has been developed from previous research on the subject. Most of the previous research presented below has been conducted on youth in Western democracies.

2.1 Introduction: two broad approaches

The theoretical framework based on previous research has been divided into two broad approaches that has previously been laid out to explain low voter turnout among youth. Turnout in elections is often claimed to be an indicator of the quality of a representative democracy. The research conducted on countries in Sub Saharan Africa on this subject so far shows that in these countries, young people vote less that the older generations just like in democracies in the rest of the world.\textsuperscript{11} The existing literature on the subject concludes that young people seem to be interested in politics, but not in traditional politics.\textsuperscript{12} This chapter will account for the main explanations laid out in previous research to why young people do not vote.

One of the explanations from the literature on the subject emphasizes access to political information and the individual’s preferences and background as determinants of how likely someone is to vote. The other school of thought instead looks at the political side and argue that the political system does not create enough incitements and fails to encourage young people to vote. According to this approach, the way elections are held determines to what extent youth feels engaged in the political process.\textsuperscript{13}

2.2 Political knowledge and awareness

This line of thought points to previous research that concludes that young people are less interested when it comes to engaging in traditional politics. According to this hypothesis, circumstances in an individual’s life will determine how likely the person is to vote or not. The focus here lies on the individual prerequisites and preferences of the young citizen. Having access to political information as a young person is an important factor that will determine if someone is going to vote, according to this school of thought. Other aspects on the individual level that influences voting behavior is how interested and aware young people are of the political world around them. Furthermore, socioeconomic status has proven to affect political participation. Scholars argue that low voter turnout among youth can be explained by the fact that young people tend to have less access to socioeconomic status, political information and the other factors recited above in comparison to the older generation.\textsuperscript{14}

2.2.1 Socioeconomic status, family socialization and access to political information

Socioeconomic status is one explanation previously laid out to understand low voting turnout among youth. An individual’s socioeconomic status could also be considered a result of how the political system is shaped. However, socioeconomic status has been analyzed as part of the individual’s background in previous research and therefore falls into the category of political knowledge and awareness in this study. Previous research has shown that education and income are important factors when it comes to voting. Costs of voting is frequently discussed in the literature. Costs in this case refers to the amount of time and money that an individual will have to spend when voting. For example, getting to the polling station might imply a high cost in terms of money for someone that is poor.\textsuperscript{15}

Young people tend to have lower socioeconomic status than the older generations in general. Among the young people that holds a higher socioeconomic status, most of them will have lower “real” costs of voting than the ones with lower socioeconomic status. The reason for


\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
this is that higher socioeconomic status often comes together with more time and money. The ability to understand and process political information is also considered to be higher among those who possess higher education. People with lower socioeconomic status tend to have less access to political information, mostly due to their lack of education in general. The lack of political information tends to make them less engaged in the political process since it sometimes involves understanding complex political procedures. There is also evidence that unemployed people are even less interested in politics than others with low socioeconomic status.\textsuperscript{16}

Family socialization into politics is another important aspect according to this approach. Families engaging in frequent political discussions has been found to encourage a political interest among youth. Previous research has found that youth who often discusses political matters and democracy in the family are more prone to vote. There is also research to support the theory that engaging in community groups and other civic associations provides young people with important opportunities to share political information, thereby increasing their likeliness to vote. The trust that is built within civic associations also appears to have an impact on the youth, giving them more incitements to engage further in politics on local community level.\textsuperscript{17}

2.2.2 Alternative value

This approach has been one of the dominant ones in trying to explain why young people abstain from participating in traditional politics. According to this line of thought, young people are engaged in politics but seeks to address their own political agenda outside formal politics. Young people do not feel like formal politics can be a helpful tool for them to achieve political change, and instead seeks to join social movements and other single-issue campaigns. They also tend to view their careers as good opportunities to achieve political change.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Henn, M., Weinstein, M., Forrest, Sarah., Uninterested Youth? Young People’s Attitudes towards Party Politics in Britain, Political Studies, 2005, p. 559.
In other words, youth are indeed as engaged in politics as before, they are simply choosing different ways to participate that is outside the spectrum of traditional politics since politics means something else to them compared to previous generations. For example, previous research on British youth found that this is based on a skepticism among youth towards how the political system is operating. This skepticism is one of the reasons for their interest in addressing the political questions that they care about outside formal politics. To sum this approach up, youth are in fact engaged in politics, perhaps equally as the generations before them. They simply experience and understand politics in a different way. Traditional politics does not provide a framework in line with the youth's thoughts that enables them to address their political interests.

2.3 Institutional and party system context

This approach lays out a different explanation to why young people are increasingly abstaining from voting. According to this school of thought, focus need to lie on the importance of the political system itself rather than on the individuals. Scholars argue that the political system plays an important role in encouraging young people to engage in politics and voting. How elections are held and how the elections and the political system manages to encourage and create incitements for young people to vote and engage in politics are highlighted as important factors in this approach.

2.3.1 Political efficacy

Even if the youth are engaged in politics, the formal political system does not seem to be suited for the context and the world that young people are experiencing. When seeking answer to the generational differences, political efficacy is something that is frequently brought up as an explanation to the generational differences in political participation. In broad terms, political efficacy is defined as a person’s trust in the politicians and the government in combination with a general feeling that they understand political affairs. Citizens also needs

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to feel that they have the possibility to influence politics to have high political efficacy. In other words, the political efficacy is high if a person feels like he or she is able (has a “real” chance) to contribute to political change and if this person is also able to trusts the politicians. Existing literature on the subject suggests that the higher political efficacy a person has, the more likely the person is to vote in elections. Understanding political affairs is considered a natural prerequisite for citizens to be able to process political information in a fast manner.23

2.3.2 Electoral competition

Although it is not proven that electoral competition affects youth in a higher extent than the voting population in general, it is an important aspect that has been shown to be true about the population in general. This is often relevant for one-party states. If there is no real competition between political parties in elections, people tend to abstain from voting since they can predict the outcome of the election if one party is dominating.24 An election that has electoral competition between political parties can not be as easily foreseen and seem to make citizens more inclined to vote. The natural reason for this is that it gives them a stronger feeling that their vote matters. South Africa is a one-party state. Several parties are represented in the parliament even though the largest party has been in power for 24 years, holding over 60% of the votes.25

2.3.3 Partisan attachment

Partisan attachment is another theoretical approach laid out to understand low voter turnout among youth. Partisan attachment refers to the extent to which a voter identifies with a specific party. Previous research has found that identifying with a specific party gives access to basic political information. The political information can be acquired through the political party without the person having to sacrifice a high cost in terms of time in to acquire the information. Following this line, a young voter would be more inclined to cast his or her ballot in national election if he or she identifies with a specific political party. Although with this said, the weakened polarization between political parties in the past decades has made

voters in general identify with a specific political party in a lower extent than former generations.26 27

Typically, youth feels less tied to one specific political party compared to older generations. The main explanation given to this phenomenon has been that youth are more inclined to be interested in environmental issues, immigration and other political problems that some consider to be more transnational than national issues. The traditional politics that focuses more on left- or right oriented questions does not provide an arena for the youth to clearly identify with one specific party when being engaged in this type of political questions. Young people seem to experience that parties focuses more on left or right wing oriented political questions rather than questions about the environment and globalization that are important to them, and because of this they abstain from voting.28 29

3. METHOD

In this chapter, the design of the thesis and the choice of method used to collect data will be presented and motivated. The thesis has a qualitative approach and in depth-interviews has been conducted with young people between 18-28 years old in Cape Town and its suburbs. This study focuses on two different socioeconomic groups to understand how their views on voting differs from each other. The selection and sampling of these two groups will be closer introduced later in this chapter. The thesis has a case study design and the chapter will begin with a short review of the case of South Africa, accounting for a brief political history with challenges that the country faced before becoming a democracy.

3.1 Case study

The selected design for the study is a case study design. In this section, I will motivate the selection of case and the methodological approach. In case studies, a specific phenomenon is analyzed. This design provides a good possibility to make a deep investigation into a specific case.\textsuperscript{30} Case studies can be a valuable research design when developing theories but can be equally as valuable when testing theories.\textsuperscript{31} The aim of this study is not to test these theories since it is not possible to falsify a theory based on ten interviews. Instead, this thesis seeks to investigate if these theories can help explain why young people do not vote.

How generalizable a sample is depend on how the case is chosen. If a case is chosen carefully in relation to the research problem, it will add to the generalizability of the study.\textsuperscript{32} Strategically choosing a specific case for the case study is therefore important. Declining voter turnout among youth is a challenge that democracies all over the world has been facing in the past decades. South Africa is studied as a critical case in this thesis. Flyvbjerg defines the critical case as one that has “strategic importance in relation to the general problem”.\textsuperscript{33} The case selection of South Africa in this thesis is based on the country’s characteristics of being a young democracy and one of the leading countries on the African continent when it

\textsuperscript{30} Merriam, S. B., \textit{Fallstudien som forskningsmetod}, p. 24-25.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 225-226.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p. 229-231.
comes to democracy and economy. Since South Africa is considered a role model in terms of democracy in this regional context, investigating what issues young people have when it comes to voting in this democracy might also tell us something about the issues that young people in other young African democracies might be experiencing.

South Africa is studied as a “least likely” critical case in this thesis. As a least likely case, South Africa is studied with the following logic: “If this country is experiencing issues with voting among youth that relates to the democracy, so are most other democracies in this regional context.” In other words, South Africa is the case that is least likely to experience voting issues related to the democracy among the democracies in Sub Saharan Africa. Thus, if incitements to vote are weak and if problems with voting are expressed among youth in South Africa, we should expect to find these issues occurring in other less developed Sub Saharan democracies as well.

3.2 The case of South Africa: History and contemporary politics

South Africa is a young liberal democracy with a dominant party system. The abolishment of the apartheid regime in 1994 indicated the start of a new democratic era that has faced and is still facing political challenges. South Africa has a system of quasi-federalism which means that the provinces are self-governed to a certain extent. National and municipal elections are held every five years.

The African National Congress (henceforth referred to as ANC) has been the dominant party in South Africa since the removal of apartheid in 1994. The party has managed to secure votes from a large majority of the population in the past 25 years but has recently been involved in corruption and undermining institutions and the law to preserve their power. Corruption and other political issues that one-party states often faces has led the ANC to loose support among

34 Flyvbjerg, B., Five Misunderstandings about Case-Study Research, Qualitative Inquiry, 2006, p. 229.
36 Vusi, G., Political economy of Post-Apartheid South Africa, p. 28-29.
the population in recent years, even though they remain the ruling party with the highest number of seats in the parliament.\(^{37}\)

The Apartheid system in South Africa was implemented shortly after 1945 and the system managed to remain institutionalized until the middle of the 90’s. The Apartheid regime institutionalized racism by controlling the relationship between white, black and coloured. By using legislature, politics and the economy to the white population’s advantage it ensured that white people would be subordinate politically and economically.\(^{38}\) During the apartheid, blacks and coloured were removed from the city centers and separated from white people. They were put in communities with limited access to water, food, transport etc. When apartheid was abolished in 1994, the society in South Africa had severe challenges to overcome. The society was segregated, and a large part of the population was poor. Nelson Mandela, who has come to play an important role as a symbol of the freedom from apartheid and of equality, became president for ANC in 1994.\(^{39}\) While ANC has managed to implement changes to reduce inequalities and to protect the observance of people’s rights and freedom, the legacy of apartheid continues to be present. The living situation in the townships, in which it is estimated by World Bank that 38% of the working population lives, remains largely unchanged until today. The non-white population is often unable to acquire education of quality as well as higher education and employment, making it difficult for them to improve their socioeconomic status due to poverty.\(^{40}\)

The country is one of relatively few contemporary states that has a dominant party system, although this is a question of definition. Several parties are competing in the national elections, but the dominating party South Africa’s African National Congress has secured a majority of the votes in every election since the first free General Election of South Africa in 1994.\(^{41}\) ANC secured 66 percent of the votes in national election in 2009 and 62,15% in the General Election in 2014.\(^{42}\) Apart from the ANC’s obvious strong position in National


\(^{39}\) Vusi, G., *Political economy of Post-Apartheid South Africa*, p. 4-5.


Assembly, the party also holds a strong cultural value because of its continuous opposition against the apartheid regime in the second half of the 20th century, especially among the underprivileged black population. Most scholars consider South Africa to be a one-party state since ANC has not had real competition from other parties since the first free election in 1994. However, the other parties have managed to strengthen their positions in the past years since ANC’s support among the population has declined in the last two elections.

From the end of Apartheid in 1994, the ANC led the country with Mandela at its point. After Jacob Zuma became elected president in 2013, the support of the party has continued to diminish due to corruption and non-elected actors influencing the political agenda. While Zuma is to face 783 charges of fraud and corruption in court during 2018, Cyril Ramapshosa was elected new president in February 2018. Democratic Alliance (DA) is currently the strongest opposition party, while the newly formed leftist party EFF continues to establish a stronger support prior to the national election held in 2019, especially among the youth. Contemporary hot topics on the political agenda in South Africa are the high crime rates, unequal distribution of wealth and land, corruption and the high unemployment rates which affects the young people to the highest extent.

Previous research has shown that the cultural memory of apartheid plays an important role when it comes to voting among youth. The people born after 1994 in South Africa are sometimes referred to as the “born frees”: they were born after the abolishment of apartheid and therefore grew up in a democracy. Previous research has found that the young people seem to have high expectations from their families and communities to honor the people and party that made South Africa free from Apartheid by voting, but some of them do not seem to feel that their vote matters. Socio-economic disadvantages seem to have an important role to play as to why young people do not vote, especially when it comes to the high unemployment rates among young people in South Africa.

44 Ibid., p. 240-241.
46 Ibid.
3.3 Semi-structured respondent interviews

The methodological approach used in the study is in-depth respondent interviews. Qualitative in-depth interviews are used when the aim is to understand how people experience their own world. With this purpose, I consider qualitative respondent interviews to be an appropriate choice of method to answer the research questions. Since the study is looking for a deeper knowledge on the youth's attitudes, semi-structured interviews offers structure in the form of the same semi-open questions that has been asked to every respondent. It also offers flexibility since the aim is to make the questions open to the extent that the respondent can talk freely about his or her opinions when answering the open question.

The first step in the interview process has been to get informed consent from the respondents and informing them that they are participating in a research study. The youth in the underprivileged group lacks education and some of them connects opposing the political consensus with a certain extent of violence. It has been important to make it clear for the respondents participating in the study that the research is not a cooperation with a South African political party, authority or company. Since this topic might be sensitive to them, they have been offered the possibility to be anonymous with the purpose of getting a better quality of the answers in the interviews.

3.4 Considerations before interviewing

An important aspect to consider before interviewing is to have maximal variation among the respondents; the aim is to have every “type” of respondent interviewed to make sure that no certain type of young group has been missed. For this study, the aim is to interview respondents as widespread within the age of 18-28 as possible and gender has also been considered by choosing both men and women for the interviews. Women and men may be facing different types of challenges in terms of political participation, especially in the townships of Cape Town. People from the middle class and underprivileged youth are interviewed in this study. However, the study does not have maximal variation among

49 Ibid., p. 236-237.
52 Ibid., p. 270-271.
socioeconomic classes since it does not account for the views of the upper middle class. No interviews with people from this class has been conducted. The study does not have maximal variation on this area since this the upper middle class might have a different view on voting that is not represented in the study. No interpreter has been used during the interviews since the respondents speak fluent English, although it is their second language.

3.5 Selection of respondents

The focus of this thesis lies on the views on voting among youth in the geographical context of Cape Town. In total, ten young respondents between 18-29 years old have been interviewed. To be able to understand how the views on voting differs between different socioeconomic groups, two different groups of people have been interviewed in this study. The first group consists of five young people that live in the townships of Cape Town and the second group consists of five students at colleges that can be considered middle class. Since respondent interviews seeks to understand the thoughts of the youth, it has been possible to replace the respondents when some of the young individuals that was asked did not want to participate. The respondent does not answer the questions in role of a certain position but according to how he or she views the world, which made the respondents replaceable with other young people that fulfilled the criteria mentioned above.

Respondents in the study are chosen based on their socioeconomic status. Race and structural racism is and has been one of the most debated topics on the political agenda since the end of Apartheid and extreme cleavages still exists between the white and black population. A selection that might seem self-evident in the study would be to compare black disadvantaged with white privileged people. However, most people that represent the minority of white people in South Africa belongs to the upper middle class and therefore they are not represented in this study.

In qualitative studies case studies, it is not always necessary to have a large sample to be able to generalize the result to the rest of the population, although it is often beneficial. However, generalization is not the only desirable outcome for research. Flyvbjerg concludes that to

53 Townships are informal settlements or suburbs that was officially designated for black occupation during the apartheid.
conduct any form of study that contributes to further knowledge within a specific field can be equally desirable.\textsuperscript{55} This study is based on ten qualitative interviews and therefore the result can not be theoretically generalized. However, Hammersley argues that there is a difference between theoretical and empirical generalization. Hammersley describes empirical generalization as in a study where “the particular setting investigated is typical of some larger whole or aggregate”.\textsuperscript{56} Since I have done a strategical sampling of the respondents in this case, which I will motivate closer below, the setting in which they are researched has importance for the case as a whole. Thus, the results of the study can be empirically generalized.

3.5.1 Underprivileged youth

The group of five underprivileged respondents consists of young people that lives in the townships of Cape Town and are either unemployed or still enrolled in last year of high school. The young people interviewed live in the townships of Gugulethu and Phillipi, two of Cape Town’s biggest townships. Young people in the townships faces challenges such as high crime rates, poverty, drug abuse and lack of education. Two people living in Cape Town that had previously worked with underprivileged youth in the townships recommended two unemployed people from the townships to interview, and the snowball effect was later used to interview their friends. It is estimated that 38\% of South Africa’s working population live in the townships, which makes them an important eligible voting group to investigate in this study. Naturally they are also an important voting group to reach for the political parties.\textsuperscript{57} This group represents perhaps the largest group in the country that is somewhat socioeconomically homogenous and might also be the group that would benefit the most from political change and development.

Even though the majority of people living in townships are poor, a certain extent of socioeconomic differences inside the townships also exists. The interviews were conducted with young people that had previously been in contact with an NGO, which was how they were reached for interviews. Safety, poverty and unemployment is a big issue and precise

\textsuperscript{56} Larsson, S., \textit{A pluralist view of generalization in qualitative research}, International Journal of Research & Method in Education, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{57} World bank, \textit{The Economics of South African Townships}, 2015.
numbers of how many people that resides in the townships does not exist. There is a risk that the opinions of the young people that are unable to get in contact with an NGO and unable to leave the poorest areas in the townships are unaccounted for in this essay.

3.5.2 Middle-class students

Five students studying at colleges in suburbs of Cape Town aged 18-29 have been interviewed to get another perspective on the study. Interviewing two different social classes provides an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of how socioeconomic differences affects young people’s views on voting. This group lives in suburbs of Cape Town and are studying at colleges outside the city center or in suburbs. This group can be considered middle class in a South African perspective, although South Africa is a developing country and the middle class is small compared to other industrialized countries. The young people in this group were approached and asked to participate in the study at the Central Library of Cape Town.

3.6 About validity and reliability

Hjerm, Lindgren & Nilsson writes that translating the quantitative based terms validity and reliability into qualitative studies might not always be the best option when determining if the study has a high quality. Translating these concepts into qualitative studies becomes problematic since qualitative studies are not based on repetitive measurements. Neither does qualitative studies deal with fully standardized procedures of measurements in the same way as quantitative studies do. Instead, Hjerm, Lindgren & Nilsson gives suggestions on other possible strategies that can be used to strengthen the quality when analyzing and gathering data in qualitative studies. Taking time and being thorough when analyzing data and creating the thematic structure is one of these strategies.⁵⁸ In order to strengthen the quality of the study with regard to this strategy, the transcriptions of the interviews has been read and re-read several times. During the process of working through the data, the codes and themes found in the material has continuously been developed and refined.

Another important aspect to consider in qualitative studies is that the analysis should stem from a broad spectrum of empirical observations to strengthen the quality of the study.\textsuperscript{59} This is one of the reasons that two different socioeconomic groups were interviewed for the study. The fact that the study presents a perspective on voting both from the poor youth in the townships and the middle-class students strengthens the quality. Interviewing two socioeconomically different groups have made the result of the study more nuanced and able to capture views from different segments of society.

### 3.7 Ethical considerations

Before each interview, the respondents have been informed that they are participating in a research study and that they can choose not to continue at any stage of the interview. As some may regard politics as a sensitive question, they have been clearly informed that they can remain anonymous in the research study if they wish. The respondents are not interviewed as being in a certain role or position. Since their thoughts are studied and not themselves as an observer of a certain event, I have made the judgement that offering the respondents anonymity will not make the credibility of their answers lower.\textsuperscript{60}

The youth has given consent to participating in the research study but are unaware that they are participating in roles of being underprivileged. My choice to refrain from telling them this is based on the aim to create a climate in the interview where no respondent feels subordinate. I want to hear how they experience their world without telling them what their world looks like or how they should be experiencing it by categorizing them as underprivileged.

### 3.8 Method of analysis

The method used for analyzing the results of the study is thematic coding. Each interview has been recorded and transcribed when preparing for the coding. Before coding, each interview has been read and reread several times. In this qualitative study, the aim has been to find specific codes in the interviews reflecting the respondent’s opinions and thoughts about voting. The choice of using thematic coding is considered appropriate since it is the

\textsuperscript{59} Hjerm, M., Lindgren, S., Nilsson, M., \textit{Introduktion till samhällsvetenskaplig analys}, 2014, p. 82-86.

respondents' opinions that are being searched for while coding, although I have not known beforehand exactly which opinions will be expressed and how these opinions will manifest themselves in the interview. In the initial state of this procedure, codes that reflect the respondents' thoughts about voting have been created and has eventually ended up in larger themes. These themes have been changed and refined throughout the coding process. 61

Most studies are not completely inductive or deductive. When coding the material and creating themes in this study, I have been following an abductive logic. Inductive studies have their starting point in the data, and from the data at hand relevant codes and themes can be developed. Deductive studies, on the other hand, have their starting point in the codes and themes, and from there testing the data generated from the study. 62 The abductive logic that is used in this study combines both inductive and deductive logic. 63

After coding, themes have been created from the material with a starting point in the theoretical framework. The analytical framework used to code the interviews consists of the different theoretical approaches presented in the second chapter: Socioeconomic status, alternative value, political efficacy, electoral competition, partisan attachment and family socialization. Codes have been divided into themes that fit this theoretical framework, and other codes that do not fit into any of these themes has been used to create new themes. These themes will be presented more closely in chapter four where the analysis is presented. The transcriptions from the two groups have been coded separately: first, they were coded with starting point in the theory. After coding the two groups, they have been compared with each other to see how they differ. Similarities and differences found in the material will be accounted for in the next chapter.

63 Ibid., p. 67.
4. ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the material generated from the conducted interviews will be presented and analyzed. The connections between the theory and the material will be laid out and interpretations of the material will be supported with quotes from the respondents. The chapter is divided into different parts that derives from the theoretical approaches. The theoretical approaches are used as an analytical framework for the study. The chapter ends with a short summary of the main findings of the study.

4.1 Socioeconomic status and access to political information

When talking about voting, the young people from the townships mentions struggles with lack of income and education as one of the main obstacles that they are experiencing. The high unemployment rate in South Africa is something that is brought up in every interview in both groups, although it is the underprivileged group that the unemployment seems to affect the most. One underprivileged respondent from this group, who thinks he is going to vote next year, says:

In my township we don’t have water. […] We stay in shacks and we struggle a lot because most of the black people, we are very, very poor.[…] Most of the unemployed youth, they don’t know what they can do. Like me, I don’t know what to do or where I can go to get a job.64

Another unemployed that lives in the townships talks about the lack of quality in education: “They say that the future is for everyone. But there is no future at our schools […] because we don’t have proper classes or toilets or roads to get to school” 65

Since unemployment, poverty and lack of education was mentioned frequently during the interviews, one can expect that these issues affect their ability to care about politics. Furthermore, the lack of education seems to affect their possibility to acquire political information. For example, some of these respondents do vote but several of them said that they “do not know anything about politics”.66 The challenges that they are facing in their daily life might make political participation a low priority. When it comes to costs of voting, no

64 Respondent 8.
65 Respondent 9.
66 Respondent 2.
respondent mentioned the cost of getting to the voting station as an obstacle for them. However, one of the respondents lays out a different reason to why he does not vote:

They will use people on the grounds for them to gain votes. The politicians won’t go to the fancy neighborhoods to convince people to vote for them because they already know how the system works. So they go to our neighborhoods to find people who are uneducated, who can't read, because these people have seen the politicians in television.67

The way this respondent uses the expression "fancy neighborhoods" shows how the inequalities between classes are still very present in South Africa. The terms "our neighborhoods", as he expresses it, is frequently reappearing in the interviews when the youth are referring to the townships as opposite to the upper middle-class "fancy" neighborhoods.

Socioeconomic factors are also discussed among the middle-class students, but most frequently they are discussed when referring to how the low income and lack of education affects the underprivileged and not themselves. One student says, when asked about her thoughts about the South African democracy:

We need to make sure that voting is safe and that people aren’t driving through threatening people. In terms of being free to express an opinion about voting, South Africa is really privileged.[…] But we have a lot of inequality that reflects itself on education. So it is really easy for certain political parties to get their message out and get the people to vote for them who aren't really critical of what the party is doing.68

This respondent addresses the question of how a democracy should be functioning and expresses a knowledge about democracy and politics that is not coming through in the group of underprivileged youth. Another student also talks about democracy:

We just use the word democracy. I believe that democracy also comes with a certain extent of economic power, but we are still experiencing the same harsh treatment that our forefathers underwent under the apartheid system. You can still see that today in the living standards, the have and the have not.[…] So we were given the green light to vote, but in an actual sense there is no democracy.69

This student makes a clear line between having a democracy in theory and having a functioning democracy. The way he highlights economic power and the segregation of people

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67 Respondent 1.
68 Respondent 3.
69 Respondent 7.
as struggles even for the middle-class indicates that having a democracy in theory is not enough to him. The middle-class students express a deeper understanding of how a democracy should be functioning than the people from the townships and it seems as they have a better access to political information.

My interpretation is that the possibilities to access political information in the townships are low, which perhaps does not come as a surprise. Some of the respondents argue that political parties use the socioeconomic disadvantages to win votes from young people. The hypothesis that lower socioeconomic status makes it more difficult to participate seems to go in line with the thoughts of the underprivileged youth. The socioeconomic status appears to have an impact on possibility to participate in politics and in terms of gaining access to relevant political information. Evidence of how socioeconomic factors influences the young people's thoughts about voting are continuously laid out throughout this chapter since I have found that the two groups often differ in how they view voting.

4.2 Alternative value
Some of the middle-class respondents reflects upon how voting and other forms of more active political participation influences their possibility of addressing questions that they feel are important. One of them argues:

Politics feels like a dirty game that I don’t necessarily want to play […] although I would definitely want to get into an organization and play a role in that. Or I would just play a role in my career and making sure that it is not only looking at middle class interest, that it is in the interest of the rest of the population.70

Even though this student expresses a will to be a part of reducing inequalities, it seems as she would rather use her career to achieve these changes than getting into formal politics. A second student talks about the high unemployment rate in South Africa and his ability to affect politics:

Most black South Africans are still behind in terms of technology. I volunteered to go to the poor locations and teach a bunch of guys there to use computers […] because the only way you are going to solve the unemployment is to help them learn something to qualify for work. I can affect more working with that type of thing or with a company than trying to change politics. With politics, you are not going to change anything. It is resistant to change.71

70 Respondent 3.
71 Respondent 5.
He also adds that he will not vote in next election for the same reasons. This student also shows an interest in addressing political questions but not through formal politics – neither when it comes to voting or other forms of political participation. He also addresses the question of how the black population are undermined, which I will dive deeper into later in this chapter.

My interpretation is that the questions that these students wants to address are political since they concern unemployment and inequalities, but that these respondents want nothing to do with formal politics. Traditional politics does not seem to be the right arena to address these issues due to lack of trust to the political system and its ability to achieve change. The middle-class youth do not seem to connect voting or political participation in general with change and would rather use their careers to achieve change. Thus, the thoughts of some of the students seems to resonate with alternative value theory even though the skepticism appears to be a stronger motive for them compared to their counterparts elsewhere in the world.

The thoughts of the underprivileged young people do not seem to resonate with this theory, although one young respondent is part of a single-issue campaign:

> There is a campaign that I go to every Wednesday about education. […] We were threatened by gangsters and drug abusers so our school wasn't safe. But the campaigning helped us get security at school.\(^2\)

When the same respondent was asked if he was going to vote in next election, he continued: "When you keep on seeing that no difference is happening, what will you vote for? Just for people who only cares about money, not worrying about our struggles."\(^3\) Among the other respondents in this group, no support is found to strengthen the theory. Poverty and other problems mentioned throughout this chapter among the underprivileged respondents are likely the main reasons that other forms of participation in politics than the traditional are not brought up in these interviews. The high crime rates, unemployment and lack of food and water leads to an environment that perhaps makes them unable to engage in politics in another way than through voting.

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\(^2\) Respondent 9.

\(^3\) Ibid.
4.3 Political efficacy

In chapter two, political efficacy was defined as an individual’s trust towards the politicians and the government in combination with a feeling that contributing to political change is possible. When talking about voting, distrust and the feeling of not being able to contribute to political change was mentioned among respondents in both socioeconomic groups. My interpretation is that political efficacy is lower among the underprivileged youth:

I don’t have the power to change anything […] because us black people, we vote and vote. When the government says we must vote, we do it. But when we want the government to provide for us, we don’t get what we want. That’s why we end up not trusting the government. I don’t trust them.\textsuperscript{74}

This respondent also added that she will vote in next election but still do not seem to see how voting makes a difference in the communities. Another young man seems to agree:

Many people in Philippi voted for years, but there is no change. I grew up there and I still haven’t seen changes. But still you vote every five years and hope for change.\textsuperscript{75}

In other words, the youth do not seem to experience that they have the freedom to participate in the democracy. Even the underprivileged respondents that will vote in next election do not seem to have the feeling that they can affect politics. When talking about the state of the democracy in South Africa, an unemployed young man staying in the township of Gugulethu said: “The people who are born after 1994 are called the born-frees. I don’t see anything free in being born after 1994.”\textsuperscript{76} As previously mentioned, everyone born after 1994 are called the born-frees since they were the first people in South Africa to be born and brought up in a democracy with the right to vote. The quotes above implies that some of the respondents do not experience the freedom or the benefits of the democracy. When asked about voting, one respondent said: “I don’t think my vote makes a difference. Because people have been voting many times in my community but it has not changed how we are living.”\textsuperscript{77}

One underprivileged respondent said he will not vote since his voice can not be heard by “those guys who are on the top.”\textsuperscript{78}, which I consider to be an expression of hopelessness and

\textsuperscript{74} Respondent 8.  
\textsuperscript{75} Respondent 10.  
\textsuperscript{76} Respondent 1.  
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{78} Respondent 9.
not being able to affect politics. Referring to the politicians as the “guys who are on the top” also gives an indication on how great the distance is between politicians and voters.

Low political efficacy has been expressed to some extent among most of the underprivileged respondents according to my interpretation. They neither trust the government or feel like they have the possibility to change politics. My interpretation of these statements is that the low political efficacy stems from growing up in communities where their families and people in their communities have voted since the first free election. It seems as they have still not witnessed change in the communities in terms of eradication of poverty and increased education and that they therefore have lost trust in the politicians and in their own ability to change politics. They simply do not correlate voting with achieving political change.

There is no clear consensus when it comes to political efficacy among the middle-class students. When asked about his ability to affect politics, one respondent argues:

> I would never venture into politics and say that I am going to be able to change something. That is the worst lie in the book […] because the politicians come with these bunches of promises but they never meet these promises.⁷⁹

This student clearly does not feel that he can influence politics and does not seem to trust the politicians either. Another student described his thoughts about politicians clear and concise: “I don’t trust them at all. But there is nothing I can do about it.”⁸⁰

However, other middle-class students do not entirely agree: "Us young people think that politics are just useless and all. But growing up I kind of realized that I also matter in the political world."⁸¹ This respondent seems to argue that young people are usually uninterested in politics, but becoming an adult made her realize the importance of voting. Some of the middle-class students argues that even if corruption is a problem, if no one votes nothing is going to change: "It's important because it begins with me. If I don't vote, then who is going to vote?"⁸²

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⁷⁹ Respondent 5.
⁸⁰ Respondent 7.
⁸¹ Respondent 4.
⁸² Respondent 6.
The political efficacy seems to depend on individual factors when it comes to the respondents in the middle class. Some of them refuses to vote due to corruption and distrust, while others appear to have higher political efficacy and experience that their vote can make a difference.

4.4 Electoral competition
Lack of electoral competition appears to be an element that the middle-class students consider when they deliberate about whether to vote or not. One respondent argues:

The ANC just feels like it needs to be shaken. The things they say sounds great, but after the elections they don’t follow up because they just know that everyone is going to vote for them. So it feels like they are not doing anything.\(^\text{83}\)

The ANC seems to be perceived as a party that lacks incitements to achieve political changes since they know that they are going to win the elections in advance. Another student says it is likely that he will vote, but that some aspects makes him hesitant towards it:

If you vote for Malema and you think he is going to win, you will be surprised. ANC is going to win, ANC is always going to win. So we don’t know what happens there. But I don’t think my vote matters when it comes to that.\(^\text{84}\)

To clarify this quote, Malema is the leader of the political party EFF as mentioned earlier in the study. The statement that ANC is always going to win is a speaking example of the views that many of the students have on voting.

It seems as the electoral outcome can be predicted by the voters because of the dominance that ANC has upheld by the strong support among the voters for the past decades. This factor seems to make the respondents feel like their vote does not matter. One of the students also adds that a vote for another party than the ANC becomes a "drop in the ocean". \(^\text{85}\) Another student further strengthens this:

I sometimes think that even if I vote the wrong government is going to be selected. Because, sure, my vote might change, but then there is always this other mass that wants the other government.\(^\text{86}\)
With “the other government”, I assume that she means ANC since they are the dominant party. Mentioning the “other mass” voting for ANC shows that one vote in a country where 56 million people are living with 60% voting for the same party might feel hopeless. Another student says: "South Africa has been ruled by the same party but changed president for 25 years.[...] It's always the same ANC ruling the country through propaganda." ANC's leading position and the fact that they are going to “win by landslide”88, as one student expresses it, is something that is brought up among all of the middle-class students. Thus, the thoughts of the middle-class students seem to resonate with the electoral competition theory.

The disadvantaged youth do express that they are dissatisfied with the political parties, but there is no evidence to suggest that they have an explicit dissatisfaction towards the one-party system. In every interview with the township youth, it appears as they view all the political parties as the same. They seem to experience that the political parties give empty promises and it does not matter which party it is. This is most clear when they express the struggle with identifying with political parties below.

4.5 Partisan attachment
The respondents do not seem to be able to identify with a certain political party. This seems to concern both groups interviewed. Among the respondents who was certain about voting in next election, only one of them was certain of which party to vote for. The rest of the respondents - voting or non-voting - was not sure of which political party to identify with:

I just don’t see a political party that stands for the believes that I have. I don’t see a political party that would actually benefit me as an individual because the only time you see politicians come out in numbers is when it is time for election. The political parties are all the same. Just different name, same old thing that we have seen.89

This respondent is a middle-class student. It seems as he does not trust any of the political parties and cannot see a difference between them. Another student also argues that she does not fit in the typical voting group of a specific political party:

87 Respondent 5.
88 Respondent 3.
89 Respondent 7.
We have a multiparty system but technically there are only 2-3 parties you can vote for. The DA and the ANC feels like they have a monopoly on different voters and I don't feel like I would fully relate to either of them.\textsuperscript{90}

My interpretation is that this young woman does not feel that she fits in to the stereotypical voter of one of the major parties and therefore does not support one specific party. Her thoughts do not seem to concern the manifestos of the political parties. She also seems to experience that for her vote to make a difference, there are only a few parties that she can choose from. The other option would be to vote for a smaller party that she identifies with that does not hold seats in the parliament, but that would mean "throwing away the vote"\textsuperscript{91}, as she expresses it.

Another middle-class respondent is also concerned about the political parties and the campaigning: “They might have different names […] but they are all campaigning for power, not for the people.” The feeling that the parties are campaigning for power are frequently brought up in the interviews. When asked about voting, another student said that corruption is a major problem and that casting his ballot would be like “voting a monster into power”.\textsuperscript{92}

It appears that the hypothesis that young people do not identify with one specific party to the same extent as the older generations, and therefore are less inclined to vote, goes in line with the thoughts of some of the students. However, the study finds no evidence that the reason for the low partisan attachment is connected to the higher engagement in political questions that are not left- or right oriented. For these young respondents, the distrust towards all the political parties seem to make the respondents experience that the political parties are all the same.

Thus, the thoughts of the middle-class youth resonate with this theory to some extent. However, the party system context from Western theories is problematic to apply to such a young democracy in a developing country. Some of the respondents do not seem to identify with a specific political party although this seem to be based more on the corruption than the

\textsuperscript{90} Respondent 3.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} Respondent 5.
fact that the parties do not stand for what is usually considered more youth-orientated topics such as environmental issues. No respondents talked about the manifestos of the political parties or important ideological questions that parties stand for, which is more common in Western democracies.

A respondent from one of the townships argues that she will never vote: "There is no party that is better than the other one. All of them promises us gold but they don't care about the people."93 In her eyes, there does not seem to be a difference between the political parties. Another respondent seems to agree: "All the parties are just making empty promises and things just to buy the voters."94 Another underprivileged respondent further strengthens this:

You can vote for a political party and it wins. But all of the parties that promises us things, they will only do a few of these things that they promised.[...] They will say: vote for us and you will get free education. But there is no free education. So I think that they are all fooling with people's minds.95

The fact that they cannot identify with political parties seem to be based on the distrust towards politicians and towards the political system. It is interesting that not more people from the townships expresses loyal support for the ANC. As mentioned in the beginning of the thesis, ANC with Mandela at its point has been a symbol for freedom and the party has previously had loyal support among the disadvantaged. However, one respondent who is a middle-class student said on this subject that “even if they win faithfully or not, I support ANC”96.

Strong support towards ANC among the underprivileged youth is not found in the material. With the recent corruption debate, it is perhaps not surprisingly that too much time has passed with no change for the underprivileged youth to maintain their loyal support towards the party. Furthermore, it does not seem like the underprivileged youth consider the ideological differences between the parties.

93 Respondent 1.
94 Respondent 10.
95 Respondent 9.
96 Respondent 6.
4.6 About family socialization

Some of the underprivileged respondents mentions their families when talking about voting:

My mother used to go there and vote but I never vote. She told me that I must go there and vote. But I told her that no, I’m not going to do it. [...] because since 1994, our grandfathers and grandmothers have been voting until today. But they are still living in that same shack. 97

As a reminder, the first free election in South Africa was held in 1994. This respondent does not seem to see any benefits with voting. Another respondent in this group also mentions that his family has discussed politics and voting:

I know from my parents that many people died from this, for us to have the right to vote during the Apartheid time. I acknowledge that and I thank them. But I can’t contribute my X to a pile of paper when I know that I’m going to let this person that I vote for go and sit in the parliament and not contribute to the community. 98

Their parents seem to have taught them about the importance of voting by discussing it in the family since the parents themselves did not have the benefit of voting, although the youth still do not see the benefits of voting. An unemployed underprivileged youth further strengthens this:

I grew up with my granny, and my granny always votes and votes. The next day she is turning 70, but she is still living in a shack. I think she voted for a long time, but there is still no change. 99

He also adds that he will vote: "because the things that we wanted before that we did not get from the government, maybe we can get them now instead if we vote."

My interpretation is that family socialization has indeed played an important role and that this theory goes in line with the underprivileged youth’s perceptions of voting and the weight of voting, which strengthens what previous research has found on voting in South Africa. Young people seem to be thankful for the privilege to vote - a privilege that their parents did not have – but my conclusion is that it appears to become increasingly paradoxical for them to vote in elections to honor the political struggle when they do not witness any positive effects of voting. No respondent among the middle-class student mentioned their families when talking about their views on voting.

97 Respondent 2.
98 Respondent 1.
99 Respondent 8.
4.7 Beyond the analytical framework

Previous research on turnout among youth does not fully help understand every aspect of the perceptions of voting among youth in South Africa. When analyzing the material from the interviews, I have found recurring themes of views on voting among the respondents that does not resonate with the analytical framework used in this study. These themes could also be considered an expression of low political efficacy, but I have chosen to separate them from the rest of the theories since they are expressed as more important among South African youth than among their counterparts in more developed democracies.

The first of the three themes found outside the analytical framework in this study concerns what the action of voting means to the youth. Voting is described from several respondents as “putting an X on the paper.” In the chapter above on family socialization, a quote from a respondent from the underprivileged group was presented where he said that he would not vote due to corruption:

> I can’t contribute with my X to a pile of paper when I know that I’m going to let this person that I vote for go and sit in the parliament and not contribute to the community.\(^{100}\)

Another respondent that will not vote himself talks about his friends that are voting: “I don’t know why we must vote. I think my friends don’t know why we must vote either. They just go there and put an X”.\(^{101}\) It is interesting that voting is perceived as solely taking a pen and putting a mark on a piece of paper among several respondents in both groups. It inclines that they have been taught that voting is important before they knew why it is important, and before they can not see a benefit from voting. A middle-class student also seems to have this perception: “I just have to take a pen and put the X and nothing else.”\(^{102}\)

There does not seem to be many active voters among the respondents. This is important to bring up since it further indicates that they might not have a chance to actively participate in politics. Evidence from this study suggests that some of them do not feel that they live in a democracy, which means that even if they come to the voting polls and “put an X on the paper”, the legitimacy of the democracy might not be strong among the voters.

\(^{100}\) Respondent 1.
\(^{101}\) Respondent 2.
\(^{102}\) Respondent 6.
A second theme found in the material is gender. No discussions about gender differences came through in the group of underprivileged youth but when comparing women to men in the group of middle-class students, the women lays out different reasons to why they are hesitant towards voting in national elections. This is best demonstrated with a quote from a young woman:

I don’t like that radicalism need to involve threats of violence and things like that, and the fact that EFF is led by a black male and every time we are spoken to on campus, it’s these radical black men who don’t care about a feminist side of something.[…] So then it’s like, what’s my place in your organization?103

Two women in the group of middle-class students were interviewed. As a reminder, my point here is not to generalize this result to the rest of the women in South Africa. Rather, it is an indication to how women might understand politics different from men, especially in terms of identification with political parties.

It is important to bring up these thoughts since it seem to make women less inclined to identify with political parties and politicians. Another female respondent said “The number of women in the government seems quite high, but they are not there as game changers.”104 My interpretation is that there might be a high proportion of women in the government, but that they might not be able to address questions that they feel are important. Even though women are well represented in terms of seats in the parliament, these young respondents do not seem to experience that these women represent the voters by addressing women’s issues.

The third theme found in the interviews is the question of race and the inequalities that still exist between the white and black population. One respondent from the townships said: “most of us black people, we are very, very poor”105 The “us” in this quote says a lot about the cleavage between the white and black population that many of the respondents experiences.

103 Respondent 3.
104 Respondent 4.
105 Respondent 8.
One of the female respondents says: “especially as a black female person, everything feels limiting.”

The legacy from Apartheid seems to be making a substantial impact on the society even today, according to some respondents: “As a black south African, there is a certain constraint that makes the system push you back.” When asked to clarify in which way, he continued:

After 25 years of democracy in South Africa its still a colour-based topic going around. Obviously in all top management roles, you find a lot of white people in it but as you go lower down you find a lot of black people in it.

The differences between the black and white population when it comes to socioeconomic status are brought up in both groups and in almost every interview. The words white and black are constantly mentioned when addressing their ability to change politics, both through voting and other forms of political participation. The struggle with achieving economic independence is often mentioned. This theme is important to bring up since everybody is supposed to have equal access to political participation. Even if everybody might have equal access to political participation in theory, economic constraints seem to hinder them from having a decent life and from having real chance of affecting their own lives as well as affecting politics.

4.8 Summary

Previous research on Western democracies can help understand how youth in the middle-class view voting in a higher extent than the underprivileged youth. The result strengthens what previous research has found on the area - that youth are dependent on socioeconomic advantages to gain access to political information and to understand political affairs. This ultimately seems to affect the way the respondents understand politics and how likely they are to feel that they can contribute to political change. The alternative value approach can explain the thoughts of some of the middle-class students that expresses a will to change political questions. However, this theory does not provide a helpful framework when trying to understand why the underprivileged youth does not vote.

106 Respondent 3.
107 Respondent 7.
108 Ibid.
Most of the respondents express some form of low political efficacy. The evidence from the study suggests that the underprivileged youth does not feel free to participate in the democracy that they live in, and some of them argue that South Africa is not a democracy. The low political efficacy seems to stem from the extensive corruption and distrust towards the political system. Not only is their faith in the politicians and the political parties very low, but some of them also argue that they are helping someone to be corrupt when they cast their vote.

Electoral competition and partisan attachment goes somewhat hand in hand in the South African context. Some of the respondents feel like the outcome of the elections are predictable due to ANC’s dominance. These thoughts are expressed both from respondents that are planning to vote and that are not planning to vote. Thus, electoral competition appears to be an important factor in the case of South Africa. Few of the respondents clearly identifies with a specific party. The youth struggles with identifying with both the political parties and the politicians. Family socialization seems to influence how the underprivileged respondents view voting.

The study has found several other factors that affects the youth and how they view voting. Some respondents seem to view voting as “putting an X on a paper”, and not as having a possibility to be an active voter. Furthermore, evidence from a few of the interviews with middle-class women suggest that the lack of female role models might make women unable to find their place in political organizations since some of them do not feel that they fit into the stereotypical voting group of any of the parties. Race is a topic that consistently returns in the material. Many of the respondents seem to experience that the legacy of the structural racism from Apartheid still lives on. Lack of economic power and economic freedom is frequently discussed among the respondents. This appears to have an impact on their thoughts about voting and how real their chances are of acquiring a socioeconomic status that is necessary to access political information, and ultimately to make their voices heard.
5. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The purpose of this thesis has been to investigate what attitudes young people in Cape Town have towards voting to understand the declining voting turnout among youth. The theories developed on Western democracies during the past decades can partly help understand how young people in South Africa view voting. Of the two broad approaches laid out to explain low voter turnout among youth, it is difficult to determine which one of them that impacts the youth to the highest extent. The party system context in which elections in South Africa are held seems to influence their views on voting but the individual circumstances for the respondents also matters.

The perceptions that the youth have of voting seems to concern corruption, distrust and socioeconomic disadvantages, especially in the underprivileged group. My main conclusion from the material is that the youth are not allowed to engage in the political process and to participate as they should be able to. The theories used in the study tend to help understand the thoughts of the young middle-class students to a higher extent than the underprivileged group. The different socioeconomic groups seem to reason differently when it comes to voting. The underprivileged group mentions struggles with meeting basic human needs and does not appear to have access to relevant political information, which strengthens the theory that socioeconomic factors have a substantial impact on voting.

Electoral turnout in South Africa cannot be understood solely by the theories developed in a Western context. South Africa was turned into a democracy before extreme inequalities were erased and before basic needs were sustained for the majority of the population. It is a young democracy that needs to be understood in a historical perspective. However, since South Africa has been studied as a critical case in this thesis, there are some findings in the study that might help us understand how other young people in Sub Saharan African democracies view voting.

For example, the partisan attachment theory is problematic to apply in the context of a party system in a young democracy that works differently than in more developed democracies. The
underprivileged youth are not likely to care more about political questions that interests the youth in developed democracies (such as the environment and migration) when their basic needs are not taken care of. The respondents do not seem to consider ideological differences between parties when voting to the same extent that young people in developed democracies do. The Western theories are developed from research on political systems that takes for granted that all citizens have relatively equal access to basic human needs before voting, which makes them difficult to use to understand voting behavior in South Africa.

It is alarming that the underprivileged youth appears to have such low political efficacy. It matters because they represent such a large population of the country - a population that lives in poverty. Evidence from this study suggests that it is easy for the parties to win votes from this group without fulfilling their election pledges. Voting is one of the easiest ways participate in politics in a representative democracy. This might not always be a positive factor in a developing country such as South Africa since it takes so little to get something so powerful as a vote from people that are desperate for change. Since South Africa is considered a leading country in the African context, these issues might be occurring in other young African democracies as well. Of course, more extensive research is needed to support this but the material in the study provides an idea of which might be the most difficult obstacles for young people in young democracies when deciding whether to vote or not.

Evidence from the study suggests that middle-class women are unable to identify with political parties due to the lack of female role models in politics. The women interviewed in this study does not experience that women in the parliament gets the opportunity to address women’s issues. The respondents seem unable to see their place in political organizations in a male-dominated political world. It is important to address this issue because if women do not feel that they are being represented in the government by women, it might not matter if a higher number of seats in government are given to female politicians.

It is problematic to research a country through a democratic framework when several of the respondents believe that they are not allowed the benefits of the democracy. Apartheid was abolished over two decades ago, but the findings of this study indicates that the black
population are still experiencing structural racism as the main obstacle when trying to improve living standards. Equal participation is one of the most foundational aspects of a democracy, but the lack of economic power that follows from the structural racism seems to become an obstacle for the black population. Poverty and lack of education makes them unable to acquire a higher economic status and to access relevant political information needed to fully engage in politics. My conclusion from this is that one can not only turn to the political side of democracy to understand political participation in South Africa - economical equalities might be equally important for citizens to have equal chances of participating.

In one of his works, Dahl\textsuperscript{109} mentions five presuppositions that are necessary for a democracy to function. One of these presuppositions is effective participation, which becomes highly relevant for the case of South Africa. According to Dahl, citizens need to have sufficient and equal possibilities to express their political preferences. If citizens do not have this opportunity, the democracy will not achieve political equality. The findings of the study indicate that underprivileged youth might not have the possibility to participate because of socioeconomic disadvantages. There is no answer to the question if the underprivileged youth in this study wants to participate in the democracy because they simply do not have the possibility to participate. This raises further questions on how we should research democracies that does not appear to uphold legitimacy among citizens.

It is often argued that voting turnout is a good indicator of how well a representative democracy is functioning. Many of the respondents in the interviews do vote but does not have faith in the political system or a real chance of participating. The underprivileged respondents seem to be expected to vote even though they might not experience the benefits of voting. My conclusion is that even if we would see increasing voting turnout in next election in 2019, this does not automatically tell us that the quality of the democracy has increased. Thus, turnout in elections might not be appropriate to use as only indicator on the quality of the democracy in South Africa.

\textsuperscript{109} Dahl, R., \textit{Democracy and its critics}. 
REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1 – Interview guide

Introducing background questions

How old are you?

What is your current occupation?

What do you think about your future and your possibilities in South Africa?

What political questions are the most important to you?

- How do you feel that you can affect these political questions?

Theme 1: Previous contacts with formal politics

How do you feel about engaging in a political party or movement?

If you are not currently engaged in a political party or movement, what could make you consider engaging in politics?

Were you eligible to vote in the General Election of 2014, or will 2019 be the first time that you are eligible to vote?

- If you were eligible to vote in last election, did you vote?

Theme 2: Views on democracy and voting

Are you registered for voting in South Africa’s General Election next year?

- If not, are you planning to register for voting?
What do you think of the South African democracy and politics today?

What are your views on voting in the South African General Election next year?

- Do you feel the same way about voting in the upcoming municipal election?

If you have considered voting, what were your main thoughts when deciding whether to register for voting or not?

**Theme 3: Ability to affect politics**

What are your main thoughts about politics?

How do you feel about your chances to influence politics in South Africa?

Do you think your chances of influencing politics in South Africa will increase if you vote in the General Election of 2019?

Is there anything else that you think would increase your chances of affecting politics?
APPENDIX 2 – Respondent interviews

Respondent 1 - Anonymous, 21 years old, group 1
Respondent 2 – Anonymous, 24 years old, group 1
Respondent 3 – Anonymous, 21 years old, group 2
Respondent 4 – Anonymous, 18 years old, group 2
Respondent 5 – Anonymous, 21 years old, group 2
Respondent 6 – Anonymous, 20 years old, group 2
Respondent 7 – Anonymous, 28 years old, group 2
Respondent 8 – Anonymous, 22 years old, group 1
Respondent 9 – Anonymous, 18 years old, group 1
Respondent 10 – Anonymous, 19 years old, group 1

Group 1 = Underprivileged youth
Group 2 = Middle-class students